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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000201

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SUBJECT: SHAN CEASE-FIRE GROUPS THREATEN CONVENTION BOYCOTT

REF: RANGOON 185

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Two Shan cease-fire groups, the Shan State Army North and the Shan State National Army, threaten to boycott the National Convention (NC) if their political leader, detained since February 7, is not released. Seven other cease-fire groups appear to support the Shan effort. In a separate action, six ethnic cease-fire groups are demanding a freer, more open Convention. However, recent arrests of Shan leaders attest to the SPDC's impatience with ethnic fishing in the regime's political pond. End Summary.

[12.](#) (C) According to Embassy sources, a senior official of the Shan State Peace Council (SSPC), the political wing of the Shan State Army North (SSA-N) and the Shan State National Army (SSNA) cease-fire groups, met on February 14 with SPDC Secretary-1 Lt. Gen. Thein Sein to lobby for the release of

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SSPC chairman Gen. Sao Hso Ten. Regime authorities had arrested Gen. Sao Hso Ten and four other party officials on February 7, apparently in connection with an ongoing crackdown on Shan State political movements (reftel).

[13.](#) (C) According to these same sources, S-1 Thein Sein told the SSPC envoy (Col. Sao Gaifah, who had written SPDC Chairman Than Shwe a letter requesting his leader's immediate release) that the regime could not release Gen. Sao Hso Ten because of a "serious investigation" that required further interrogation. Lt. Gen. Thein Sein reportedly handed Gaifah an invitation card and travel allowance for the upcoming National Convention (NC), which the SSPC deputy chairman refused to accept.

[14.](#) (C) Prior to meeting with S-1, Col. Gaifah reportedly met with several Mon, Kachin, Wa, Kokang, Karenni, and Shan cease-fire group (CFG) delegates, currently in Rangoon preparing for the February 17 reconvening of the NC. Col. Gaifah apparently told the CFGs that delegates from SSA-N and SSNA will boycott the Convention unless Gen. Sao Hso Ten is released and Gaifah encouraged other CFGs to do the same.

[15.](#) (C) In a related development, Emboffs received a copy of a letter delivered to the SPDC on February 14, organized by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and signed by six other CFGs, demanding amendments to Convention procedures, including allowing free discussion; open attendance by all political parties and elected representatives; and participation of armed ethnic groups as observers. The letter also called on the SPDC to revoke its prohibition on discussion of the draft constitution outside of the official NC site. (Note: This grouping of CFGs claims if they don't have a response from the SPDC within seven days, they will release their letter publicly.)

[16.](#) (C) Comment: Burma's cease-fire groups, who seek to protect their limited autonomy and lucrative economic concessions, appear to be sending a message to the SPDC that they do not plan to roll over and quietly rubber stamp the regime's constitutional blueprint. However, their effort to use collective bargaining power to try to persuade the SPDC to make the process more open and inclusive is a risky one. The rash of arrests of Shan political leaders over the past week is a solid indication that the SPDC has little tolerance for those who believe they have the ability to rock the regime boat by making waves at the Convention. End Comment. Martinez